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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #2082/01 2530929  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 100929Z SEP 07  
FM AIT TAIPEI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6738  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7237  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 8494

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 002082

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS  
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: As Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies September 8-10 continued to report on Taiwan's UN referendum and the APEC annual meeting in Sydney, Australia, coverage also focused on the cross-Straits negotiations over the Olympics torch relay route, and on Taiwan film director Ang Lee's winning his second Venice Film Festival Golden Lion for best picture for his film, "Lust, Caution." The pro-independence "Liberty Times" ran a banner headline on page four September 10 that said "You [Shyi-kun]: Other Countries Have No Right to Obstruct Taiwan's Nation Building [Efforts]."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" editorial said the recent statements by U.S. officials on Taiwan's UN referendum reminded Taiwan that it needs to work harder to push and turn Taiwan into a normal country. A separate "Liberty Times" op-ed said Taiwan's UN referendum has sent a clear signal from the 23 million Taiwan people to the United States. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said Bush's timely reminder of the value of Taiwan democracy at the APEC meeting "can pave the way for better dialogue on key issues concerning U.S.-Taiwan ties." An op-ed in the pro-unification "United Daily News," however, said the current situation indicated that Washington and Beijing have started to "jointly manage" the Taiwan issue. End summary.

A) "Revelations of APEC Annual Meetings to Democratic Taiwan"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (9/8):

"... Judged from the United States' perspective, President George W. Bush's open and positive attitude toward Taiwan at the APEC annual meeting was certainly appropriate and reasonable. The island's UN referendum is the free expression of the Taiwan people's collective will, and it is a concrete realization and announcement of democracy and human rights. The United States' attempt to define the referendum as tantamount to Taiwan independence, citing the reason that it will 'alter the status quo across the Taiwan Strait,' was obviously a misinterpretation on its part and a violation of the basic principles of democracy and freedom. ..."

"The disagreement between Taiwan and the United States over the UN referendum this time has enlightened our country in many ways. This matter, which is still under development, has indicated several facts: The Communist regime tramples on the freedom and human rights of the Chinese people, and surely it will not allow the Green and the Blue political parties in Taiwan to push for referenda. Also, since U.S. National Security Council senior director Dennis Wilder has declared that neither Taiwan nor the Republic of China is a normal country, we have to work harder when it comes to building our nation into a normal country. As for President Bush's attitude at the APEC, it highlighted that a big democratic country at least will not openly deviate from the principles of universal truth and justice. ..."

B) "Send a Clear Signal to the United States"

Cao Changqing, a China-born freelance journalist based in U.S, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (9/10):

"The referendum on the island's UN bid under the name Taiwan is a wise chess move made by President Chen and the DPP, and it has achieved three significant results: First, the UN referendum has forced a U.S. official to state that 'the Republic of China is not a country,' a move that is akin to nailing the KMT's lie that the ROC is still recognized by the world, and an open announcement to the international community the death of the ROC. ...

"Second, the referendum has forced the pro-China secretary-general of the UN to state that 'Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China' when he rejected Taiwan's application for the UN membership. This statement has led the United States to send a formal letter to the UN, clearly rejecting the UN secretary-general's view. Such a move indicated that the U.S. position is that 'Taiwan is not part of the PRC.' ...

"Third, since the ROC is not a country, and Taiwan is not a part of the PRC, the future of Taiwan can only be determined by the Taiwan people themselves. The statements by the U.S. officials were tantamount to providing a logical foundation and condition for the Taiwan people's efforts in pursuit of 'name change, writing of a new constitution, and a normal country.' Former AIT Chairperson Therese Shaheen said during a speech in California in July that the Taiwan people should clearly articulate what they are pursuing and that they must not send out 'ambiguous messages,' so that the United States can better understand Taiwan's future direction. As a democratic country, the United States will not ignore other countries' wish 'to cry out loud for freedom.' The 'referendum on the island's UN bid under the name Taiwan' is exactly a clear signal

from the 23 million Taiwan people to 'cry out loud for freedom.'  
..."

C) "Bush Recalls Value of Democracy"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (9/10):

"... Washington has worried about 'misperceptions' and 'miscalculations' across the Taiwan Strait as any serious attempt to realize a 'unilateral change' of the current status of the Taiwan Strait has the potential to endanger U.S. interests in the region and even drag U.S. soldiers into a 'hot' conflict. ... However, the way in which the Bush administration has dealt with these perceived or actual attempts, as manifested in recent statements by high ranking U.S. officials, has been controversial. ... When added to the 'uncomfortable, inconvenient and undignified' transit conditions given to President Chen on his way to and back from Central America last month, such statements created a 'misperception' in Taiwan that Washington had virtually become a mouthpiece for Beijing.

"Moreover, the Bush administration's strategy to separate President Chen from the general Taiwan citizenry by criticizing him for 'lack of leadership' has neglected the fact that, at least on the question of the U.N., Chen's position is supported by the overwhelming majority of the Taiwan people. Hence, the 'Washington card' has not seemed to work this time as President Chen, bolstered by clear evidence of strong support in opinion polls, is determined to push forward the referendum for participating the U.N. together with the March 22 presidential election. ... The fact of overwhelming and bipartisan support for Taiwan's entry into the U.N. is the most 'inconvenient truth' that Washington decision-makers must take into account. ...

"Hence, it was quite a relief to see that Bush declined to dance to Beijing's scripted rhythm and instead only restated his own existing position about Taiwan and recited Washington's 'concerns' on the referendum issue. ... Bush's remarks indicate that despite differences over the question of Taiwan's push to secure its proper place in the community of nations as its status as a democratic and developed nation merits, the relationship between the U.S. and Taiwan remains that of friendship not enmity. ... Bush's statements also stood as an important and timely correction of Washington's excessive tilt toward authoritarian China while constantly putting pressure on the Taiwan government for its perfectly justifiable moves toward democratic consolidation. ...

"Bush's turnaround was decisive and fortunate as the image of

Washington and Beijing standing together to obstruct Taiwan's democratic rights of self-determination would have intensified rising anti-American sentiment and constitute a sad mockery on the quality of U.S. global leadership and its commitment to democracy. We believe Bush's timely reminder of the value of Taiwan democracy can pave the way for better dialogue on key issues concerning U.S.-Taiwan ties and urge President Chen and the DPP administration to respond positively. We also urge Washington to follow up with serious dialogue to help reduce misperceptions in the future and also to display greater respect for the will and the wisdom of Taiwan's democratic citizenry."

D) "Understanding the Bush-Hu Meeting? Stop Bluffing!"

Journalist Sun Yang-ming opined in the "United Notes" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (9/8):

"... In fact, a week prior to the meeting between U.S. President George W. Bush and Chinese President Hu Jintao [at APEC], Washington had decided that Bush would not make any open remarks on Washington's Taiwan policy during the APEC leaders' meeting. But the Bian administration has failed to obtain such a message, and the simplest reason behind this was because the Americans have no more interest in talking to the Bian administration. ...

"As a matter of fact, the Bush administration has set up a four-person, cross-departmental task force to address the Taiwan [referendum] matter. In order to be discreet, three of the four task force members had met jointly with TECRO Chief Joseph Wu earlier and expressed Washington's policy attitude on Chen Shui-bian's UN referendum and his transits in the United States in August, but unfortunately it was to no avail.

"The three [U.S.] officials' meeting with Wu was aimed at telling Taipei the U.S. policy as comprehensively as possible, in the hope that the Bian administration will no longer work through the loopholes as it usually does. But the communication failed to reap any desirable results, and the consequence was a mess. Washington's feelings were thus understandable. Given such circumstances, Washington had to turn to Beijing to negotiate and work out a way to stabilize the cross-Strait situation. The current situation is that even though Washington is reluctant to admit that it is 'managing' the Taiwan issue jointly with Beijing, the truth is more or less moving in this direction. When compared with the previous practice whereas Beijing 'accused Taipei' last year and it was Washington which 'ruled and implemented' [the decision], the situation now appears to be less favorable for Taiwan. ..."

WANG